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THE RETURN OF A NATIVE

BY P. W. WILSON

To revisit England after an absence of three years—and especially three years of the social turmoil that has followed the armistice—could not but be for an Englishman an experience at once fascinating and poignant. About the landscapes, so familiar, there was now a strange unfamiliarity, as if something—or someone—had changed—a change, not indeed in those fields, by comparison with the prairies so curiously green, or in the hedges that enclosed them, but in the eye itself which for the first time views them, as it were, from a distance, objectively. One realized why it is that Englishmen, after domicile abroad, whether in Asia, Africa or America,—for in this respect it makes no difference,—can never again be quite at home in England. These nomads have seen with their eyes what their people at home have not troubled as yet to imagine. They have looked over the hedges to the horizons beyond, and in their gaze these far horizons must ever be reflected. For every pilgrim who goes forth, the New World is a discovery, but for the American of seventy times seven generations the Old World remains, as Rome remained to the Celts of Cornwall, a sub-conscious memory—like a child's sense of the mother who died at his birth. The Old World can never know the New World as well as the New World knows the Old.

Take Fleet Street, the proverbial haunt of the press. Of her newspapers, dignified, accurate, and restrained, Britain has been justly proud. But in Fleet Street to-day there is a crisis. While the price of paper in the open market has fallen, many journals are tied to war contracts which have still a period to run. Labor is costly and the coal strike slumped advertisements, which source of revenue is only beginning to recover. All this means that newspapers are apt to be smaller than their normal size and that there is room for an ampler interpretation

of life and events overseas. At the Foreign Office I found men like Sir William Tyrrell, who accompanied Lord Grey to Washington, and Sir Arthur Willert, who gained his experience in that city as correspondent of *The Times*; but even in the Foreign Office, though humanized out of all recognition, one was amused by the whimsical remark, "The spirit of Lord North is not dead."

One noticed first how large and crowded are the cities for so small a country. Here is population twice as dense per square mile as that of Japan. And for England, as for Japan, the fundamental problem is how to maintain and, still more, how to raise to a higher level the standard of life on an area so restricted. In the States, where poor men can and do constantly become rich or at least "comfortably off", you can talk plausibly to the wage-earner about production and output and an opportunity for all, but in Great Britain where, broadly speaking, the coal and mineral fields are under full development—and some approaching exhaustion—there is not this sense of limitless resources, still to be tapped. The English feel that for them there is so much and no more to be spent and enjoyed per head, and the question how the heritage is to be shared thus becomes vital to every household. When politicians call upon the workers to increase production, the workers have hitherto listened, if at all, with impatience. To them, output means export—commodities for others than themselves to enjoy—and export, so they think, means higher profits for the employer at stationary wages for the employed. Labor, thus arguing, is faced this winter by a sad disillusionment. The idea that the markets of the world will pay any price asked by British industry, whether Capital or Labor, for British coal, iron or cotton, is slowly but surely disappearing under the harsh stress of unemployment. France is getting her coal from Germany, and Germany is supplying finished steel at a figure which Britain must demand for pig-iron. Hence the great blast furnaces which I saw standing cold and silent—a spectacle all the more significant because it is reported as general. That the iron industry will revive, everyone believes. Railways, both in Britain and in India,—to give one factor,—must have metal. But the busi-

ness has received, for the moment, a knockout blow and at Mansfield, in the very heart of a prosperous mining area, I watched hundreds of men spending an idle day in the town square, where the only activity was displayed by a newspaper boy, selling a sheet called *The Early Bird*, entirely devoted to those sports which inspire betting. There is among the English a passion for glorious uncertainty which drives them into every quarter of the world, and when they remain at their own fireside, on humdrum money when Saturday comes round, they find an outlet either in religious emotion, as inspired by Wesleys and Whitefields and Moodys, or in games and races—football, pigeon flying, celery-shows, horses, dogs, fowls—any medium for competition with prizes. In many quarters, I heard regrets that the bookmaker should have so thriving a business. It was pointed out that mathematically his must be an undertaking which, on balance, draws money from the pocket of the wage-earner—money not to be spared with ease by the wage-earner's wife and family.

Unemployment has thus failed to limit expenditure—at any rate, to the extent one would have expected—or out of door recreation. Cricket and football are supported by a generous patronage. The famous games at Grasmere drew to that charming village among the Lakes of Westmoreland an amazing train of char-a-bancs and motorcars, most of them hired by persons of small means. Agricultural shows, improvised in remote dales, gathered hundreds of pounds in an afternoon, at the gate. There are those who believe that it will take one more stern lesson this winter to teach the nation the duty of daily work; that with all the distress and anxiety, thrift has still to be learned. My impression is that a salutary awakening has already come. At the various Trade Union congresses the proceedings have been conducted in a very gentle tone. The miners, for example, are less than they used to be in the hands of their young and advanced rhetoricians, and in negotiations they now refrain from pressing demands which, as they rightly perceive, must imperil their own—and indeed all—industry. Railway men openly confessed to me that the time had come for everybody to settle down to his task, and in quarters where I should not have

expected it I found a strong conviction that industry requires a complete liberation from the barbed-wire entanglements of Trade Union rules. Some of these, as quoted to me, seemed almost inconceivable in their economic futility. With large reserves of labor unemployed, there must be of necessity a chance for the open shop which the masters are advocating with unaccustomed boldness. I gathered that objection is not taken to Trade Union hours and wages so much as to the regulations which appear to waste the workers' energies and fritter away his time. For these regulations, it may be that employers have only had themselves to blame. In many industries before the war unfair wages and hours provoked among the workers their still existing unreasonable attitude. The reaction against organized labor is, however, none the less severe on that account. A policy of strikes has impoverished the Unions, which have had to realize their accumulated investments at heavy depreciation. While paying their dues, the members of the Unions have begun to ask what precisely, of recent years, have been the benefits accruing to them as contributors to a common fund. There is in Britain undoubtedly what in the United States would be called a "radical" movement. Of this movement, the large circulation of *The Daily Herald*—this despite its price raised to twopence or four cents—is evidence. But it did not seem to me that the intellectuals in British Socialism—men like Ramsay Macdonald—were holding their own. Mrs. Philip Snowden, after visiting Russia and seeing things there for herself, has swung clearly from the left wing to the right. Her husband is no longer reckoned among the firebrands. Indeed, the fear in some quarters is that the reaction will sweep the country too far. Every reasonable person admits that the sweating system, as denounced by Charles Kingsley and immortalized to infamy in his *Song of the Shirt* by Tom Hood,—a system which condemned thousands of women to toil for three cents an hour and even less,—was a blot on the industrial escutcheon of England. A dozen years ago Sir Herbert Samuel, then at the Home Office, established Trade Boards which rescued these virtually enslaved workers. The Trade Boards are now being assailed and their abolition is demanded, which,

to be candid, seems an indefensible proposal. It is not the 10½d (21 cents) an hour made payable to seamstresses that imperils British industry. At present rates of exchange, it only works out at about seven dollars a week. The attack on the Trade Boards does show, however, in what direction sentiment is moving.

While the middle classes have rallied against insurgent Labor and with remarkable success, there is throughout the nation a cheerful camaraderie. The very retail tradesmen who suffered most severely from the coal strike collected money to pay for meals to be given to the miners' children. "No boy or girl in our district," said one business man, "went hungry." Yet this business man was an outspoken critic of the Trade Union leadership. There is, I think, a feeling that, after all, rich and poor in Britain have suffered and fought and died together, and that three years after the armistice they are together confronted by common dangers. If the workers are foolish, then, it cannot be claimed that the thinkers have been altogether wise. Among all classes there have been faults, followed by an atonement of heroism.

I cannot say that I found in Britain evidences of a religious awakening. The great Brotherhood meetings and adult schools, which were such a feature in the Churches before the war, are still staggering under the loss of their bravest and best young men, killed or crippled. Dr. Jowett, summoned from Fifth Avenue by command of the King and persuasion of the Prime Minister, has preached with tender sympathy, but, at the moment, he is in the south of France, recruiting from ill-health. Veterans like Dr. Clifford of the Baptists and Dr. F. B. Meyer of the Congregationalists do not seem to have successors. Indeed, the Free Churches, which have lost Dr. Campbell to Anglicanism and are hardly represented by that brilliant expositor, Dr. Orchard, appear to be fighting a soldiers' battle for faith and reverence. The Established Church is in the exactly converse situation. On social and industrial questions, the Archbishops and Bishops issue quite audacious pronouncements and the pulpit of St. Paul's Cathedral rings with the consecrated cynicism of Dean Inge. Socialists like Father Adderly of

Covent Garden are heard with attention, and feminism—inevitable where women are in an excess of two millions—makes its influence felt especially in a Church where the majority of worshippers has long been drawn from that sex. I am told, however, that the progressive leadership in the Church of England has yet to penetrate rural deaneries. There is a background even here of intense conservatism. It is only in Wales that the Church is disestablished, and Welsh Episcopalianism promptly voted itself an Archbishop. Also, an acquiescent Prime Minister compelled Parliament to nullify disendowment by grants of public money!

That England is ripe for a great era of personal and national religion, is obvious. All that I am indicating is that the character of that era has not yet declared itself. Many Churches are crowded. On a weekday, there were at least six hundred persons attending evensong in St. Paul's Cathedral. To the lessons, as to the exquisite and unaccompanied singing, they listened with profound attention. The fact is, of course, that the British are to-day a nation of mourners. Everywhere it is the same; children killed, or children sent on service to the ends of the earth. Even to-day the outpouring of the nation's best life is wonderful. And with it there is a great zeal for higher education. Historic schools like Eton and Harrow and Winchester, which sent their boys by the thousand to battle and the grave, are crowded once more by a new generation. Oxford and Cambridge are full of undergraduates, so full that foreign students cannot always find accommodation. As India is discovering, the governing reserves of England are gravely depleted, but the gaps are already being filled, and it is even said that some professions—medicine, for instance—are overcrowded.

I am not myself much inclined to admire obelisks, and when I saw London's memorial to Nurse Cavell, I confess that I was disappointed and even indignant. That such a monument should have been reared without including the immortal utterance, "Patriotism is not enough," among its inscriptions, seemed to me an outrage upon a great international martyr and heroine. Londoners themselves are far from satisfied with this addition to their sights to be seen. But with the cenotaph in Whitehall,

"To the Glorious Dead," I was impressed far more deeply than I could have thought possible. I had not realized the touches of sombre radiant color, yielded by the flags, motionless as sentinels, nor the banks of flowers, perpetually renewed by rich and poor—wreaths and crosses and humble bunches of wild blossoms that for weeks at a time have stretched across Whitehall and forced the police to divert the traffic from that busy avenue. In the Abbey one heard, as usual, the guides droning their rigmarole about kings and queens long ago dead and gone, but there did not need to be any guide to the simple stone in the nave, beneath which lay, in French soil brought with him, the ever unknown soldier. All day and every day, crowds gather around that spot and linger over the grave, with faces bent and eyes often averted from observation. Very pathetic were these emotions among a people reckoned to be so reserved as the English.

Not that on the surface you would detect sorrow. On the contrary, what I saw everywhere was a smile. It was the kind of cheerfulness that pervades a hospital, where all are comforted because all share the same trouble. "The reason why people here are so happy," said I to a friend, "is that they have now no treasures on earth, but only in heaven!" So heavy have been financial losses that the victims have nothing now to worry about; for thousands, it is a case of starting things afresh, from scratch. Hence, there is a new appreciation of those benefits which money cannot buy. At the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool—raided by the unemployed a few days after I landed—no fewer than eight hundred persons daily passed the turnstile and studied the pictures. In the National Gallery, fronting Trafalgar Square in London, I found crowds of people, examining the rearranged masterpieces of that collection. There and at Hertford House, where the Wallace Collection is again to be seen, the roofs had been rearranged with a view to better lighting, and lectures on the art of which examples are shown were regularly delivered for any who wished to listen. It seemed as if "admiration, hope and love"—by which we live—were asserting once more their claim over the spirit of the nation.

P. W. WILSON.